

at his hand. "But I'll tell you what I'll do, Mac. I've got a hunch, and I'll just see that three thousand."

He wrote the sum on a slip of paper, signed his name, and consigned it to the center of the table.

French Louis became the focus of all eyes. He fingered his cards nervously for a pace. Then, with a "By Gar! Ah got not one leetle beet hunch," he regretfully tossed his hand into the discards.

The next moment the hundred and odd pairs of eyes shifted to Campbell.

"I won't hump you, Jack," he said, contenting himself with calling the requisite two thousand.

The eyes shifted to Harnish, who scribbled on a piece of paper and shoved it forward.

"I'll just let you-all know this ain't no Sunday school society of philanthropy," he said. "I see you, Jack, and I raise you a thousand. Here's where you-all get action on your pat, Mac."

"Action's what I fatten on, and I lift another thousand," was MacDonald's rejoinder. "Still got that hunch, Jack?"

"I still got that hunch," Kearns fingered his cards a long time. "And I'll play it, but you've got to know how I stand. There's my steamer, the Bella—worth twenty thousand if she's worth an ounce. There's Sixty-Mile with five thousand in stock on the shelves. And you know I got a saw-mill coming in. It's at Linderman now, and the scow is building. Am I good?"

"Dig in; you're sure good," was Daylight's answer. "And while we're about it, I may mention casual that I got twenty thousand in Mac's safe, there, and there's twenty thousand more in the ground on Moosehide. You know the ground, Campbell. Is they that-all in the dirt?"

"There sure is, Daylight."

"How much does it cost now?" Kearns asked.

"Two thousand to see."

"We'll sure hump you if you-all come in," Daylight warned him. "It's an almighty good hunch," Kearns said, adding his slip to the growing heap. "I can feel her crawl in up and down my back."



"We'll Dance Some More By and By. The Night's Young Yet."

"I ain't got a hunch, but I got a tolerable good hand," Campbell announced, as he slid in his slip; "but it's not a raising hand."

"Mine is," Daylight paused and wrote. "I see that thousand and raise her the same old thousand."

The Virgin, standing behind him, then did what a man's best friend was not privileged to do. Reaching over Daylight's shoulder, she picked up his hand and read it, at the same time shielding the faces of the cards close to his chest. What she saw were

three queens and a pair of eights, but noboddy guessed what she saw. Every player's eyes were on her face as she scanned the cards, but no sign did she give. She laid the hand face down again on the table and slowly the lingering eyes withdrew from her, having learned nothing.

MacDonald smiled benevolently. "I see you, Daylight, and I hump this time for two thousand. How's that hunch, Jack?"

"Still a-crawling, Mac. You got me now, but that hunch is a rip-snorter persuadin' sort of a critter, and it's my plain duty to ride it. I call for three thousand. And I got another hunch; Daylight's going to call, too."

"He sure is," Daylight agreed, after Campbell had thrown up his hand. "He knows when he's up against it, and he plays accordin'. I see that two thousand, and then I'll see the draw."

In a dead silence, save for the low voices of the three players, the draw was made. Thirty-four thousand dollars were already in the pot, and the play possibly not half over. To the Virgin's amazement, Daylight held up his three queens, discarding his eights and calling for two cards. And this time not even she dared look at what he had drawn. She knew her limit of control. Nor did he look. The two new cards lay face down on the table where they had been dealt to him.

"Got enough," was the reply. "You can draw if you want to, you know," Kearns warned him.

"Nope; this'll do me."

Kearns himself drew two cards, but did not look at them. Still Harnish let his cards lie.

"I never bet in the teeth of a pat hand," he said slowly, looking at the saloon keeper. "You-all start her rolling, Mac."

MacDonald counted his cards carefully, to make doubly sure it was not a foul hand, wrote a sum on a paper slip, and slid it into the pot, with the simple utterance:

"Five thousand."

Kearns, with every eye upon him, looked at his two-card draw, counted the other three to dispel any doubt of holding more than five cards, and wrote on a betting slip.

"I see you, Mac," he said, "and I raise her a little thousand just so as to keep Daylight out."

The concentrated gaze shifted to Daylight. He likewise examined his draw and counted his five cards.

"I see that six thousand, and I raise her five thousand . . . just to try and keep you out, Jack."

"And I raise you five thousand just to lend a hand at keeping Jack out," MacDonald said in turn.

His voice was slightly husky and strained, and a nervous twitch in the corner of his mouth followed speech.

Kearns was pale, and those who looked on noted that his hand trembled as he wrote his slip. But his voice was unchanged.

"I lift her along for five thousand," he said.

Daylight was now in the center of the kerosene lamps above flung high from the rash of sweat on his forehead. The bronze of his cheeks was darkened by the accession of blood. His black eyes glittered and his nostrils were distended and eager. They were large nostrils, tokening his descent from savage ancestors who had survived by virtue of deep lungs and generous air-passages. Yet, unlike MacDonald, his voice was firm and customary, and, unlike Kearns his hand did not tremble when he wrote.

"I call for ten thousand," he said. "Not that I'm afraid of you-all, Mac. It's that hunch of Jack's."

"I hump his hunch for five thousand just the same," said MacDonald. "I had the best hand before the draw, and I still guess I got it."

"Mebbe this is a case where a hunch after the draw is better'n the hunch before," Kearns remarked; wherefore duty says, 'Lift her,

Jack, lift her,' and so I lift her another five thousand."

Daylight leaned back in his chair and gazed up at the kerosene lamps while he computed aloud:

"I was in nine thousand before the draw, and I saw and raised eleven thousand—that makes thirty. I'm only good for ten more." He leaned forward and looked at Kearns. "So I call er five thousand."

"You can raise if you want," Kearns answered. "Your dogs are good for five thousand in this game."

"Nary dawg. You-all can win my dust and dirt, but nary one of my dawgs. I just call."

The saloon keeper finally spoke: "If anybody else wins, they'll have to take a mortgage on the Tivoli."

The two other players nodded. "So I call, too."

MacDonald added his slip for five thousand. Not one of them claimed the pot, and not one of them called the size of his hand. Simultaneously and in silence they faced their cards on the table, while a general tiptoeing and craning of necks took place among the onlookers. Daylight showed four queens and an ace; MacDonald four jacks and an ace, and Kearns four kings and a trey. Kearns reached forward with an encircling movement of his arm and drew the pot in to him, his arm shaking as he did so. Daylight picked the ace from his hand and tessed it over alongside MacDonald's ace, saying:

"That's what cheered me along, Mac. I knowed it was only kings that could beat me, and he had them."

"What did you-all have?" he asked, all interest, turning to Campbell.

"Straight flush of four, open at both ends—a good drawing hand."

"You bet! You could a' made a straight, a straight flush or a flush out of it."

"That's what I thought," Campbell said, sadly. "It cost me six thousand before I quit."

"I wisht you-all'd drawn," Daylight laughed. "Then I wouldn't a' caught that fourth queen. Now I've got to take Billy Rawlins' mall contract and mush for Dyea. What's the size of the killing, Jack?"

Kearns attempted to count the pot, but was too excited. Daylight drew it across to him, with firm fingers separating and stacking the markers and I. O. U.'s and with clear brain adding the sum.

"One hundred and twenty-seven thousand," he announced. "You-all can sell out now, Jack, and head for home."

The winner smiled and nodded, but seemed incapable of speech.

"Name your snake-juice, you-all—the winner pays!" Daylight called out loudly to all about him, at the same time rising from his chair and catching the Virgin by the arm. "Come on for a reel, you-all dancers. The night's young yet, and it's Helen Breakfast and the mall contract for me in the morning. Here, you-all Rawlins, you—I hereby do take over that same contract, and I start for salt water at nine a. m.—savvee? Come on, you-all! Where's that fiddler?"

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